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Follow-up to the Fourth World Conference on Women and to the special session of the General Assembly entitled "Women 2000: gender equality, development and peace for the twenty-first century": implementation of strategic objectives and action in the critical areas of concern and further actions and initiatives: current challenges and forward-looking strategies for the advancement and empowerment of women and girls

Statement presented by International Federation for Family Development, a non-governmental organization in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council

The Secretary-General has received the following statement, which is being circulated in accordance with paragraphs 36 and 37 of Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31 of 25 July 1996.

* E/CN.6/2005/1.

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Statement

1. The condition of women has experienced marked improvement in education, health, economics, legal issues. However, the underlying challenge is to acknowledge and accept women for who they are and the unique contributions they can make in the family, society and the workplace with their specific feminine qualities. Women have an irreplaceable role in all aspects of family and public life as they are especially gifted to establish and maintain relationships and to care for others.

2. Home and family will always occupy a central place in the life of women. Household work, motherhood and full-time occupation in the education of children should be treated, valued and respected as professional work. Women should have the freedom to choose this lifestyle. It is in the family, the basic structure of society, where character is formed in its members. Men should respect the human dignity of women and society should develop conditions favoring work at home so that women are not compelled to work outside the home.

3. Men and women have equal dignity and responsibility as human persons. Therefore, women have a right to take an active, responsible part in all levels of public life, to be leaders. There are no specific tasks for women because what is specific is the way the work is done. By virtue of their special gifts, women can greatly enrich civil life. They are oriented to teamwork, the concrete, communication, time management, leadership. This is particularly clear in family and social legislation. Women bring to the professional world their personal dimension, assuring that human values will be respected when it comes to policies that affect family, economic and social life.

4. As the presence of women continues to increase in the labor force, policies should be established to make the workplace compatible with family life, without loss of productivity. Women in the workplace, out of necessity or special situations, often find themselves having to choose between home and work. Flexible work schedules and maternity leaves are some of the policies that could be implemented globally. Husbands, fathers and children should take their share of household work according to the characteristics of each particular family.

5. Strategy for the advancement and empowering of women is not for them to imitate the male role and try to become more like men, seeking power in an antagonistic way, or by ignoring male/female differences. The strategy is to acknowledge that both sexes have equal dignity and complement each other, and act accordingly. The recognition and respect for the differences between men and women, where each one brings their specific talents and gifts, will result in harmonious collaboration.

6. Lastly, as concluded in the XVIth International Family Congress (IFFD) in New York, 2004, "Policies should aim at fostering equal dignity between women and men within their families and bring about a full sharing of domestic and social responsibilities and employment opportunities, favoring a balance between external work and family responsibilities, especially among the female-headed families".